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The Challenge
of
The Cross





THE CHALLENGE OF THE CROSS



A Sacred Drama for Seven Young Ladies and Choir

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SUGGESTIONS FOR PRESENTATION.

Explanatory notes are given in the text wherever deemed necessary, but the following suggestions, the result of experience, may prove helpful.

The success of the exercise depends much upon young ladies being chosen for the different parts who can enter fully into the spirit of the selection. The young lady taking the part of Evangel may well be somewhat older and more mature than the others.

The crosses needed may be made of wood, except the one for the third disciple, which, being better than the others, may be a small ornamental cross. The crosses should be different sizes, and the one for the sixth disciple much larger and heavier than the others, being at least four feet in height. This cross should be placed on the floor and the others on a small table at the back of the platform.

It will be more effective if the disciples are seated at different places in the audience, and come forward in their turn, rather than to enter from the back of the platform.

The choir should sing softly, and without instrumental accompaniment, its parts coming in very promptly as the last word of preceeding speech is spoken. The choir may be concealed if desired.

C. A. M.

The time required for presentation is about twenty-five minutes.



THE CHALLENGE OF THE CROSS.

EVANGEL:—

I am here today as the messenger of the Heavenly King. I have come to call for disciples for Jesus Christ. I invite all, old and young, rich and poor, men, women and children, to enroll themselves under the banner of my King. His words are: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. Behold, I stand at the door and knock: If anyone heareth my voice and will open unto me, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me." Who is ready to accept my invitation? The reward is a hundred fold in this world, and in the world to come, eternal life. "The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come', and let him that heareth say 'Come' and take of the water of life freely."

*The Choir sings: (257, 1st)**

Come, said Jesus' sacred voice,
Come, and make my paths your choice;
I will guide you to your home;
Weary pilgrim, hither come.

First Disciple appears.

FIRST DISCIPLE:—

Sweet Evangel of the Great King, I have heard thy voice. Thy inviting words have charmed my ears. I have marked the ease of the service required and the greatness of the reward. I, for one, have a desire for that rest and peace, and that bright crown thou offerest. Enroll me in that noble band of disciples who own Jesus Christ as Master.

EVANGEL:—

Right welcome thou art into the company of disciples! I shall enroll thy name among my Master's followers, and there will be joy among the angels over thee. Here, I give unto thee this badge of the disciples. (*Offers a cross.*) Our Master bore and endured

The figures refer to the number of the hymn in the Methodist Hymnal.

the cross for us, despising its shame, and he bids His disciples to take up the cross and follow Him.

FIRST DISCIPLE:—

Why! Didst thou not promise peace and happiness to thy Master's followers? I looked for pleasure and ease in His service, and, behold, thou offerest me a *cross*, that badge of servitude, self-denial, and suffering! Must I give up harmless pleasures and cherished ambitions and bear that cross?

EVANGEL:—

That is the Master's way and command. Thou art saved to serve; thou art to conquer by self-surrender. The way of the cross is the way of light. Thou wilt find thy life by losing it. This is the path martyrs, heroes and saints have walked; it is the one the Master trod, and leads to the Gate of Pearl. I plead with thee, take this cross and follow after Him in the path that leadeth unto life—glorious and everlasting.

FIRST DISCIPLE:—

I will make any reasonable sacrifice, but I do not like that cross. Besides,—I am going, and before me are——

EVANGEL:—

I perceive thou art not worthy to be a follower of Jesus. Thou art a lover of the world and self and not of God. Thou wouldst enjoy the reward and avoid the toil and struggle; thou seekest a crown but shirkst the battle. The Master has not chosen thee.

The First Disciple leaves.

The Choir sings: (428, 1st)

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone,
And there's a cross for me.

EVANGEL:—

How truly the Lord hath said, "Straight is the gate and narrow is the way that entereth into Life, and few there be that find it." But I will call again: Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!

Second Disciple responds.

SECOND DISCIPLE:—

Sweet Messenger of the Master, I heard thy call and have accepted the invitation. I marked my foolish friend who refused to bear the cross. Count me a happy cross-bearer in the King's service. Whither He directs I will follow—bearing His Cross.

EVANGEL:—

Thou speakest like a willing disciple who will bring joy to my Master's heart, and He will honor thee.

(The Disciple examines the different crosses.)

What art thou doing?

SECOND DISCIPLE:—

I am selecting a cross.

EVANGEL:—

Thou wert not invited to *select* but to *bear* the cross. The Master is the cross-giver, thou the *bearer*. Here is thy cross. *(Gives a cross which the Disciple takes.)* Bear this cross for Him.

SECOND DISCIPLE *(To herself)*:—

What a clumsy, forbidding and heavy cross she gave me! I am willing to follow Jesus in a pleasant path; but to bear such a painful burden is more than my patience can stand. Why did she not give me a lighter one? One that would be congenial to my taste, and be suitable to my circumstances and associations? I will change it for such an one. *(Lays down the cross and searches for another.)*

EVANGEL:—

What art thou doing?

SECOND DISCIPLE:—

The cross thou gavest me is not suitable to my taste and position. It is too heavy and rough, and I am seeking a different one, more congenial and light. It will be quite as good as long as it is in the form of a cross.

EVANGEL:—

Thou art to bear the cross the Master appoints for thee. Infinite wisdom devised it and infinite love offers it. Thou canst not change it to please thyself without displeasing the Lord.

SECOND DISCIPLE:—

I will gladly bear *this* cross. (*Holding up one.*)

EVANGEL:—

Nay, that is not the cross appointed for thee. (*Takes it from her.*) I perceive thou art not a *willing*, but a *willful* cross-bearer. Not thy Master's, but thine own will is thy pleasure. Thy tongue gives ready service, but thy heart is not yielded unto Him. The Master hath not chosen thee, because thou hath not chosen Him.

The Second Disciple retires.

The Choir sings: (524, 1 st)

My Jesus, as thou wilt;
O may thy will be mine!
Into thy hand of love
I would my all resign.
Through sorrow or through pain
Conduct me as thine own,
And help me still to say,
"My Lord, thy will be done."

EVANGEL:—

The day is passing and the night cometh when no man worketh! How fruitless has been my task! "Who hath heard my report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Surely my mission is in vain! All day long have I labored and none——

THIRD DISCIPLE (*Speaking as she comes forward*):—

I offer myself a soldier of Christ. I shall gladly bear the cross. I pray thee prove me and mark my loyalty and enthusiasm in this

cause! I am proud of the distinction and I glory in the task laid upon me!

EVANGEL:—

Thou seemest indeed a ready disciple. The Master loves those who have a willing mind. I give thee *this* cross to bear after Him.

(The Disciple kisses the cross, clasps it to her bosom and bows the head a moment in silent prayer before speaking.)

THIRD DISCIPLE:—

Thou art a beautiful ornament, and so popular! I shall wear thee upon my bosom, and thou shalt depend from my neckchain of gold and pearls. I cannot see why anyone should object to carrying a cross. It is so elegant and ornamental! I shall show my cross for the admiration of all. Look! Is it not beautiful, bewitching!

EVANGEL:—

My sister, what art thou doing?

THIRD DISCIPLE:—

Worshiping the cross—that beautiful emblem of my faith!

EVANGEL:—

Worshiping the cross! This is not the service the Master asked of thee! *(Takes the cross.)* Thou art to bear—not worship the cross. It is not by adorning it that the cross is made beautiful; not by bowing the head or bending the knee to it is it made powerful. Many there are who admire the cross on their church, but shun it from their lives. Many there are who wear it for an ornament, but reject it as the instrument on which they are to crucify their sins, their selfishness, and their pride. They are the people who think a poetic sentiment is the godliness the Master requires. It is not the bejeweled, the beautiful cross that redeems the world and the soul from sin; but the cross of Calvary—the cross on which the old life dies that the new may appear. In such a cross only is power and it overcomes the world.

The Third Disciple leaves in humility, and the Fourth approaches

EVANGEL:—

Here comes a friend—possibly another seeker for service. Peace to thee, my sister! What is thine errand today?

FOURTH DISCIPLE:—

I have come to find a place among the disciples of your Master. I believe it to be my reasonable duty. I have given the subject much thought, and I now offer my service, and await your orders.

EVANGEL:—

“Whosoever cometh shall in no wise be cast out.” It is for such as thee the Master calleth. Hear His words: “Whosoever would be my disciple let him take up his cross and follow me.” In accordance with His requirements I offer thee this cross, to bear and honor for His sake. (*Disciple takes the cross, turns aside and hides it in her dress.*)

What art thou doing?

FOURTH DISCIPLE:—

I am hiding the cross you gave me,—but I will bear it—only I do not care to have it known to the public.

EVANGEL:—

Hiding the Master’s cross! Knowest thou not He will have no secret disciples? He who confesseth Him before men, will He confess before the angels and His Father. Art thou ashamed of His cross? He bore it for thee openly and publicly. Watch Him climbing Calvary’s brow? See Him fastened on the accursed tree suffering and dying for thee! Ashamed of His doctrines! Ashamed of His people! Wouldst thou be a soldier and reject the flag and the uniform? Wouldst thou be saved and not recognize the Savior? I call thee not to bear the cross today (*Takes it from her*), but get thee into thy closet and repent, for the Master rejects thee. (*Disciple starts to go*). But wait! Listen to the Master’s words to such as thyself: “Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

In shame the Fourth Disciple retires while the Choir sings: (443, 1st and 4th).

Jesus, and shall it ever be,

A mortal man ashamed of thee?

Ashamed of thee, whom angels praise,

Whose glories shine through endless days?

Ashamed of Jesus! that dear friend
On whom my hopes of heaven depend!
No; when I blush, be this my shame,
That I no more revere His name.

The Fifth Disciple appears.

FIFTH DISCIPLE:—

Madam, I have marked the weakness and the unworthiness of those who have offered themselves to you as recruits. But I am sure you will be pleased with me; for I am not like them. I will bear any cross you give, openly and gladly, and shall win your approval and praise. You will be proud of me! I pray—and I fast—and I give alms, and I do many noble things, as my friends well know, and the cross will be a small addition to my tasks. Let me have a worthy one—that my friends can see and appreciate.

EVANGEL:—

Thou art indeed brave and self-confident. What is thy name, and whence cometh thou?

FIFTH DISCIPLE:—

My name is Pharisee. I live in the town of Self-glory, on Conceit Street, next door to General Pride—a beautiful town and street.

EVANGEL:—

I have heard of thy name and character. I already distrust thy fitness for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. The Master seeks for the contrite heart and the broken spirit, for the humble and lowly in heart, and thou art boasting of thy grace and gifts.

FIFTH DISCIPLE:—

Paul, the great Apostle, “boasted” about the cross he preached, why not I?

EVANGEL:—

Paul boasted *in* the cross; how much it had done for him and the world. Thou art boasting *about* the cross, and how much *thou* hast done for it. With Paul he was nothing, the Master was everything; but with thee, the Master is nothing and thou art everything.

Thou makest the cross a ladder on which thou strivest to climb into self-glory before men; but thou hast no reward from God. "Thou art bearing the cross for thine own glory. To such as thee He said: "Many will say unto me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?' And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Fifth Disciple leaves.

The Choir sings: (141, 1st and 2nd)

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

EV'ANGEL:—

My mission is almost ended, and I am called to give an account to my Master. "Many are called, but few are chosen." How great the army of pleasure-seekers and how small the host of cross-bearers. Once more I repeat His words: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

The Sixth Disciple, rising, comes forward singing: (351, 1st)

I am coming to the cross;
I am poor, and weak, and blind;
I am counting all but dross,
I shall full salvation find.
(*The Choir joins in the refrain.*)

I am trusting, Lord, in thee,
Blest Lamb of Calvary;
Humbly at thy cross I bow,
Save me, Jesus, save me now.

SIXTH DISCIPLE:

I have come to offer my services, if not too late—more than that, to offer *myself* to the Master. I bring with me no merit, but a will—

ing heart. I come "just as I am without one plea"; and to the Master I say: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Not my will but His be done. I seek a humble place at His feet. I choose no cross, but will take the one He gives and strive to bear it to the honor of His dear name.

EVANGEL:—

My sister, if thou speakest sincerely thou art the disciple whom the Master is seeking, and whom He will honor with a great trust. I have for thee a most extraordinary service. Heavy is the cross, but mark—great is the reward. Take up that cross and follow Him. (*Indicates a large cross on the floor.*)

SIXTH DISCIPLE (Takes the cross):—

I understand dimly the lesson of following my blessed Lord. I must bear the cross, not the cross I would choose, but the one He gives. I am not to bear the cross to be seen of men and boast of it; but to bear it with humility and for service. I am to nail upon it my selfishness and selfwill, and *all* for His sake. I am to bear it openly and lovingly. Bear it against opposition and offenses, and at any cost and sacrifice. Nothing to me what others do—mine it is to follow Him—my Lord. (*Starts to go*). But, oh, it is so heavy! Sometimes I feel it would crush me! So few to help; so many to hinder! Offenses everywhere! Stumbling-blocks and snares in all my paths! Well,—let me rest awhile. (*Lays down the cross and sinks into a chair.*)

EVANGEL:—

Where is the cross thou tookest?

SIXTH DISCIPLE:

My sister, I have not cast it off. I have borne it loyally for a while, but it has galled my life. I have been hurt in the house of my friend. Home love has opposed me, associates have wounded me, business life has caused me bitterness. Tired, worn and discouraged, I have laid it aside for a while.

EVANGEL:—

But, my sister, did I not tell thee that thou must needs have offenses, and that through much tribulation thou must enter the King-

dom of Joy? It was to a conflict you were called, and not to idle rest. That was the path the Master trod, and thou art not better than He. If the Master suffered, so also must His servant suffer. Canst thou not watch with Him one hour? If others offended thee, He did not. If others disappointed thee, His love never failed. Rise, my sister, the time is short, and thine hour is almost come. Ask Him for strength and then follow after Him.

(The Disciple arises, takes up the cross and advances to the front of the platform. She kneels facing the audience, with a hand on either end of the horizontal beam of the cross. She remains in an attitude of prayer during the singing of the following hymn. While the hymn is being sung, the other disciples return one by one, and, in a spirit of humility and penitence, take the crosses previously rejected and group themselves around the Sixth Disciple.)

(The Choir sings: (463, 3rd and 2nd)

Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick, and lead the blind
Just and holy is thy name,
I am all unrighteousness;
False and full of sin am I
Thou art full of truth and grace.

Other refuge have I none;
Hangs my helpless soul on thee;
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me:
All my trust on thee is staid,
All my help from thee I bring;
Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of thy wing.

SIXTH DISCIPLE (Arises and addresses the others):—

Let us, my sisters, bear the cross after our Master. It is His to command, ours to obey. His to lead, ours to follow. His to call us to service and sacrifice, ours to answer, "Here am I, send me." His to say, "Follow me," ours to answer, "My Lord and my God." In calling us to bear the cross He offers us Glorious compensation. For

"in the cross is salvation, in the cross is life, in the cross is protection against our enemies, in the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the cross is strength of mind, in the cross is joy of spirit, in the cross the height of virtue, in the cross the perfection of sanctity. There is no salvation of the soul, nor hope of everlasting life, but in the cross."* Let us therefore take up the cross and follow after Christ. And after the cross the crown, "For he who is faithful unto the end shall receive the Crown of Life."

The Six Disciples together sing: (458, 1st)

Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave, and follow thee;
Destitute, despised, forsaken,
Thou, from hence, my all shalt be:
Perish every fond ambition,
All I've sought, and hoped, and known;
Yet how rich is my condition,
God and heaven are still my own.

*Thomas A'Kempis.



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